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Pair of Covered Cups with cut-card dado and gadrooning, made 1713-14 in London, by the Huguenot silversmith Anthony Nelme

(Gift of William Randolph Hearst)

LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM

EXPOSITION PARK · LOS ANGELES 7 · CALIFORNIA

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NEWS of the MUSEUM

ART

BERLIN MASTERPIECES—

Paid admission of 161,139 at the exhibition of Masterpieces from the Berlin Museums exceeded by 15,000 the previous high attendance of 146,322 in New York City, and brought $40,969.91 (including small voluntary contributions) for the benefit of German children in the American zone of Occupation. Almost 400,000 people visited the Museum during the 19 days of the exhibition, or well over half last year's record annual attendance of 750,000. While this good record does not mean that Los Angeles citizens are more interested in Art than the people of other cities having permanent Art collections as good as or better than the Berlin paintings, it does show that the general public took advantage, in unprecedented numbers, of the presence of this important collection. In attendance, in catalogue sales, and in smoothness of operation, the exhibition was easily the most successful in the Museum's entire history. And while the expenses of presenting this great event reached a total of just under 19-thousand dollars (for construction and display materials, catalogues, and every other need), the return from Museum sale of publications resulted in a final cost to the County of only $159.93.

LEONARDO EXHIBITION—

The dates of the Leonardo Exhibition have been set: June 1st to July 15th. This will be the first occasion in the New World of a Leonardo da Vinci exhibition embracing his Art as well as his researches, including his inventions. A month will be required to install the exhibition. About half of the working models (based on Leonardo's own drawings) have been completed; and the remainder will be constructed at the Museum by the Italian model-maker who built the first set of such models shown in Milan (later, during the past War, these were partially destroyed by fire in Japan.) The Museum will issue a special catalogue of particular interest to those who admire this greatest genius of the past 500 years.

HISTORY

COSTUME STORAGE VAULT—

Very shortly, the costume storage vault made possible by two private donations of the Fashion Group, Inc., will be completed. The Museum's large collection of early California costumes, along with its early and later American examples, will soon be transferred from their present haphazard places of storage to the first adequate vault the Museum has ever enjoyed.

THE INDIAN HALL—

Construction of new cases for the excellently planned Plains and Southwest Indian Hall has been finished by the Museum carpenters, and painting and electrical wiring are to follow. Planning of the individual exhibits is proceeding well. A model-maker has joined the History staff and is already working on dioramas for this Hall. Through a gift of $500 from the Museum Association, very fine small-scale human figures needed to illustrate certain types and activities have been acquired.

GENERAL AMERICAN HISTORY—

After the close of the Goddard Rocket Exhibit, the small General American History Hall is being set up again, with certain improvements. Originally assembled at the time when the Freedom Train was here near the Museum, the exhibit is intended to offer a bird's-eye glance at some of the main developments in this country's history.

SCIENCE

MINERALOGY HALL—

Mineralogy will soon join the recently completed Bird and Small Mammal Hall in having an entirely new look. A start has been made on the long-planned permanent Mineralogy Hall, in the Rotunda of the Old Building. Eight re-built cases with new lighting have been installed. Later on, it is planned to repaint the entire Rotunda gallery.

HALL OF EVOLVING LIFE—

Actual carpentry work on the first section of an entirely new Hall of Evolving Life (the present Hall of Osteology) will soon commence. Windows will be blocked out, and the gallery completely done over. Alcoves will be built, in which evidence from various sciences will be presented to show the development of life on our planet from the earliest known times. This project will probably require several years.

ENTOMOLOGICAL HALL—

Plans for a wholly new Entomological exhibit on the Mezzanine of the Old Building have been finished, drawing upon the Museum's large collection of insects for exhibition material. The lay-out and design embody the experience of other institutions, and are intended to facilitate enjoyment and understanding by students and the general public.

HANCOCK PARK—

Hancock Park is improving in character and appearance. Construction of the two rest rooms, fencing the service yard, 55,000 square feet of walks, laying of water mains, installation of a partial lighting system, and a structure over "pit 101" have all been completed. (Much work remains to be done by the Museum's technical staff before the public can be admitted to "pit 101.") It is hoped soon to start some planting of Pleistocene flora.

County Funds have been requested to do an equal amount of improvement in the 1949-50 fiscal year. The Museum considers this Hancock Park project of utmost importance, and hopes to complete within another three to four years the task of making Rancho La Brea the finest Pleistocene exhibit anywhere in the world.

THE LIBRARY

MEETING OF SPECIAL LIBRARIANS—

Work on the enlargement and refurbishing of the Library has advanced. This long-overdue improvement will be finished in time for the late-spring meeting of Special Librarians, in national conference, who will hold one of the sessions in the Museum Library.

—J.H.B. Jr.

COMING EXHIBITIONS

Mar. 15-April 17	**Prints from local collections**
April 1-May 15	**Ancient Chinese Mirrors, Buddhist and Other Small Bronzes**
May 10-June 12	**John Marin Exhibition**
June 1-July 15	**Leonardo da Vinci: His Art and His Inventions**

EVENTS

Mar. 6-April 10	**Series of six lectures, "History of Christian Art"—Dr. Alois J. Schardt**
April 17-June 12	**Spring series, nine weeks: Chamber Music**

SOME CUT-CARD SILVER

Not arbitrarily, as from the whims and caprices of jaded fashion, does one quite different style of silverwork follow another. The changes are gradual and orderly, with few surprises, from one style into the next; and always there are practical reasons that influence the change. But these reasons, when we search for them, sometimes prove to be of curious and unexpectable nature. It was the 17th century political quarrels of Church and State, for instance, that brought to English silver of the William III and Queen Anne reigns a new and distinctive style.

In 1685, calamity befell the long-persecuted and massacred Protestants of France, to whom the derisive name *Huguenots* had been given a century before. By Henry IV's generous Edict of Nantes (1598) they had been at least nominally assured of civil and religious liberty; and when Louis XIV finally revoked that grant in 1685, toward half a million frightened Huguenots fled from the country.

Many of these refugees crossed into England, where James II (himself a converted Roman Catholic) had just come to the throne, but where they received a wavering degree of tolerance. Here in England, as well as in France, they found that Protestant-Catholic feeling ran high. James was driven from the throne three years later, and the crown passed to his two Protestant daughters, Mary and Anne.[1] Not until anti-Catholic agitations had brought forth the Act of 1701, keeping the succession to the British throne forever within the Church of England, could the Huguenots feel secure at last.

The "invasion" of England by so many foreign artisans was at first loudly resented by the English goldsmiths, who appealed to their guild for protection from the competition of these "necessitous strangers." But the introduction of French taste and of new craftsmanly ideas (supplanting the earlier German and Dutch influences) had on the whole a greatly beneficial effect; and Huguenot names stand among the highest in English work for the next two or three generations,—such names as Paul de Lamerie and Pierre Platel, Pierre Harrache and Augustin Courtauld.[2]

It was in types and the degree of ornament, rather than in the forms of silverwork itself, that Huguenot influence made itself apparent. Amongst the English craftsmen, this was a period of relatively plain work, based on simple and typically English forms. Only very gently, over the long period until a highpoint about 1760, the Huguenot silversmiths persuaded English designers ever in the direction of rich and graceful elaboration.

FIG. 1—*Two-handled Strainer, made 1728-33 in Newcastle, by Isaac Cookson*
(Paul Rodman Mabury Collection)

Perhaps the most pleasing contribution of the French, because it was surely the one that most appropriately utilized its material, was cut-card ornament. This type of work had been employed by the French much earlier in the century,[3] and had indeed been used by the English, however sparingly, throughout the reign of Charles II (1660-85). But its flourishing period was from about 1690-1715, and it lingered in favor until around 1730.

Cut-cardwork appeared in seemingly endless variations, sometimes very simple or again floridly wrought.[4] It was used chiefly as a figured border on cups or ewers (see *Front Cover*), as a surround to the knob on lids and covers (Fig. 2), or as decoration at the jointure of spouts and handles (Fig. 3). The two-handled strainer of Fig 1[5] is given to illustrate how cut-cardwork was made: cut-out plates of flat silver, either left plain or pierced like the handles of the strainer, were soldered to a plain body, forming a design in flat relief. (The name, of course, came from its likeness to a design cut from a card with a pair of scissors.) More elaborate examples might be improved with engraving, or show cast ornaments superimposed on the cut-card silhouette (e.g. *Front Cover,* the tapering bold ribs).

Included in a group of early English silver recently presented by William Randolph Hearst[6] are some excellent instances of cut-card silverwork (*Front Cover* and Fig. 2), which come as happy additions to the few already shown in the permanent collections.

Anthony Nelme, one of the best of the Huguenot makers, is represented in the Hearst cups pictured *Front Cover.*[7] These show the straight-sided body, rounded below and on a flaring molded foot, that developed from the "porringer" cups of the latter 17th century and prevailed all through the first half of the 18th (sometimes in great sizes, with a capacity of three or four pints). The ornamented and reverse-scrolled handles are of the so-called "harp" shape especially favored by the Irish silversmiths. Cut-cardwork of strong but simple design fills the lower zone of the body,[8] with the upper area featuring a richly engraved cipher *HW* set in a cartouche amidst lush foliation. A reverse-gadrooned band is repeated on cover and foot; and the upper rise of the cover is figured with a repoussé design (that is, chased in high relief) copying the cut-cardwork of the body.

The extraordinary weight of these cups and covers (nearly 84 oz., or perhaps twice what their appearance suggests) shows their lavish use of metal,—and for this, which was characteristic of their time, there was good reason. During the last third of the 17th century, when fashion went to wonderful extremes of showy extravagance, tables and great mirrors, massive andirons and luxurious toilet services, even whole bedsteads were sometimes made of silver. Silver coins were disappearing in such quantities, being melted and converted into silverware and furniture, that the Treasury was faced with an unbearable shortage. To stop this raid on the coinage, it was ruled (in 1697, and until 1720) that all silverwork must be made of an alloy called Britannia, finer than the "sterling" quality used for coins.[9] Because this alloy, though

FIG. 2—*Sugar Dredger with pierced cut-cardwork at the finial, made 1699-1700 in London, by Andrew Raven*

(Gift of William Randolph Hearst)

FIG. 3—*Coffee Pot with cut-card details, made 1710-11 in London, by Thomas Holland*

(Paul Rodman Mabury Collection)

much "better" in quality, was too soft for use in the prevailing styles, the silversmiths were obliged to develop new designs — employing thickened metal, strengthening the edges with moldings, and making feet or other parts of solid cast silver rather than from thin sheets "raised" (shaped) with the hammer.

Superior weight, with handsome use of the necessary moldings, is again seen in the Hearst sugar dredger, Fig. 2.[10] Here the finial rises from a cut-card plate of pierced scrollwork, and the high dome is pierced and engraved in a typical design featuring urns of flowers. The lower stage of the cover, which fits down over the body as a long sheath, carries a cartouche for armorial engraving flanked by crowned lion supporters. Worn traces of pale gilt suggest that the piece was once more imposing than we now see it. Large "dredgers" such as this, for sprinkling sugar, were usually accompanied by a matching but smaller pair of "casters" for salt and pepper, or for red and black pepper.[11]

Plainer taste marks the coffee pot of Fig. 3,[12] which follows the old-fashioned form of a generation before.[13] It retains the early tapered cylindrical body, the simply shaped handle set at the side instead of opposite the spout, and even shows the scrolled thumbpiece that had been used on the lids of Charles II tankards. But it adds the refinements of its own time, in the shaping of its high-domed cover, the flourished tip of its 8-sided spout, a foliated cartouche of armorial engraving,—and three plates of cut-card-work, springing from the base of spout and handle like graceful tongues of flame.

—GREGOR NORMAN-WILCOX

NOTES

[1]Mary II ruled jointly with William of Orange from 1689-94, and William III alone from 1695-1702. Queen Anne's reign was from 1702-14, followed by the four Georges of the House of Hanover.

[2]Many Huguenot refugees, and their sons, appear also in the list of early American silversmiths. In Boston there was Apollos Rivoire, father of Paul Revere the patriot (who changed the spelling of his name "so the bumpkins could pronounce it easier"). There was René Grignon, a wandering worker; and such names as Bartholomew Le Roux or Simeon Soumaine appear in New York, or Daniel Dupuy in Philadelphia.

[3]See H. Nocq, P. Alfassa and J. Guérin, *Orfèvrerie Civile Française* (Paris, 1927); also Louis Carré, *A Guide to Old French Plate* (New York, 1931).

[4]Twenty examples are pictures in the writer's *Cut-Card Ornament,* pp. 172-176 in The Magazine ANTIQUES for November 1933.

[5]Accession number L.2100-1040, the Paul Rodman Mabury Collection—4 inches diameter, length 7 5/16 inches. A little early to be a tea strainer, and more probably meant

for toddy: to be laid across a toddy-cup, to strain out the spices and lemon pips.

[6]See also *Two Stuart Rarities,* pp. 18-19 in the Spring 1949 issue of this Museum's *Bulletin of the Art Division.*

[7]Accession number A.5141.48-610,611—height 8½ inches with cover, width across handles 8 inches. Compare a very similar, though larger, silver-gilt cup with chased strapwork ornament, by the same maker and dating only a year later: *Bulletin* of the Art Institute of Chicago, September 15th 1948 (*Front Cover*).

[8]Compare design on the pilgrim-bottle by Pierre Platel, *ibid.* footnote 4, Fig. 6.

[9]Pure silver is too soft to withstand wear, and must be toughened by "alloying" with a small added proportion of copper. Sterling silver (.925) carries 75 parts copper to every 925 parts pure silver. The Britannia standard (.958) was much softer, being in the proportion of only about 42 parts copper to 958 of silver. Britannia-standard silver, a "solid silver" of superior quality is not to be confused with britannia metal, which was a hard grey alloy first-cousin to pewter and belonging to a much later period.

[10]Accession number A.5141.48-607—height 7⅞ inches. Compare one closely similar, made the following year: *ibid.* footnote 4, Fig. 3,b. Another, Fig. 39 in C. Louise Avery, *Early New York Silver* (Metropolitan Museum of Art catalogue, 1931), is attributed to Bartholomew Le Roux the Elder (see footnote 2).

[11]For the story of spices, and of the various silver containers designed to dispense them, see the writer's *American Silver Spice Dredgers—Part I,* in The Magazine ANTIQUES for January 1944, pp. 20-22.

[12]Accession number L.2100-949, the Paul Rodman Mabury Collection—height 10⅜ inches. Compare three examples in *ibid.* footnote 4, Fig. 4. See also Fig. 45 in Avery, *op.cit.* footnote 10, for an instance in American work.

[13]See Fig. 1261 (date, 1689) and Fig. 1263 (date, 1692) in Sir Charles James Jackson, *History of English Plate* (London, 1911).

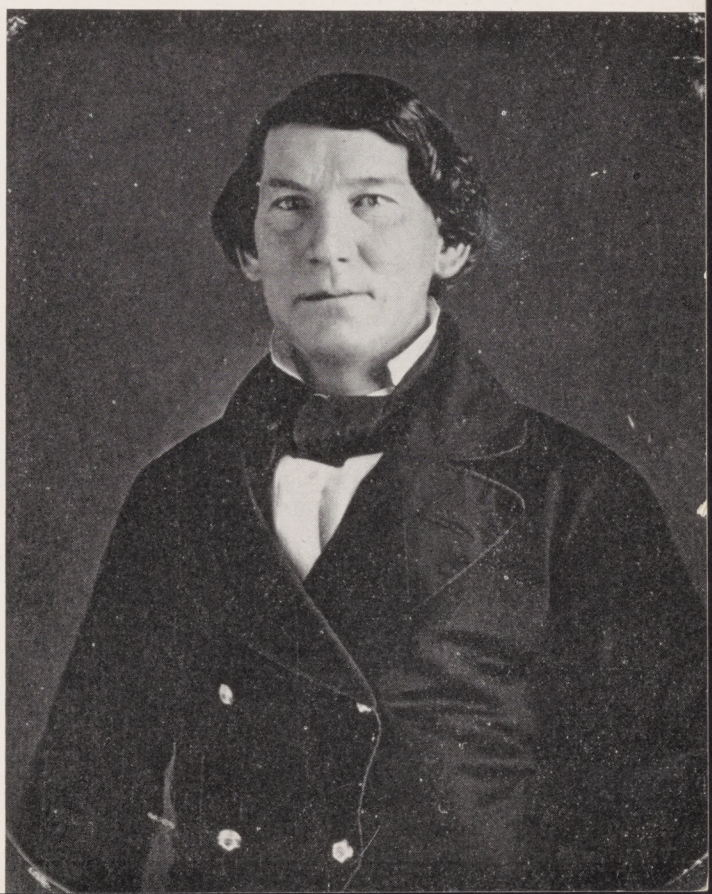
JOEL SWEENEY AND THE FIRST BANJO

The banjo is said to be the only musical instrument ever invented in North America. Recently the Museum acquired what is believed to be the grandfather of all banjos.[1]

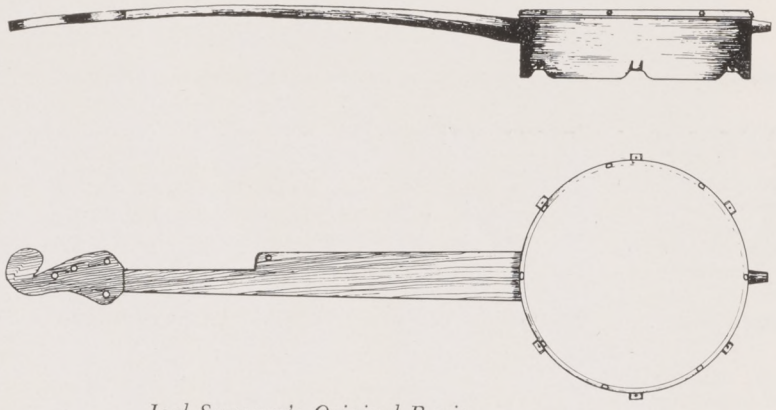
Joel Walker Sweeney was the son of John Sweeney, a wheelwright, who lived in Buckingham County, Virginia. Joel was born in 1813, not far from Appomatox Court House. By the time he was thirteen, Joel was intensely interested in music, and according to family tradition he could play quite well not only upon the four-stringed gourd shell Negro instrument, a favorite with the slaves of the early 19th century, but upon the violin as well. Neither of the elder Sweeneys could play a note nor carry a tune, but Joel and his two brothers, Sam and Richard, all became expert in the use of the banjo and in the art of blackface minstrelsy.

As Joel grew older he became dissatisfied with the gourd shell, and made an instrument of wood with

[1]Accession number A.2543-1, the gift of Mrs. J. E. Henning.



Joel Walker Sweeney



Joel Sweeney's Original Banjo

—Drawn by Cal N. Peters

a skin head instead of the more fragile gourd. About the year 1831 he added a fifth or thumb string to this new invention, thus producing the first of a long line of banjos.

Joel's musical career was launched when he was twenty-one. Ha attended the County Courts in Buckingham and adjacent counties where, on court days, there was a certain amount of festivity in the towns. He had no assistants at this time, and Joel with his banjo and his foolish doggerel verse was a one-man show. His more or less impromptu entertainments were given at night in such vacant rooms as he was able to obtain.

His fame spread, and his part-time avocation became a full-time career. He bought a horse and buggy, and traveled from town to town playing and singing. Having known the Negro slave hands all his life and having absorbed their gay tunes, as well as their more doleful spirituals, he released this accumulated knowledge in a spirited imitation of his dark-skinned mentors.

About 1840 Joel was on his way to being a professional. He joined a small circus, and for several years traveled through Virginia and North Carolina singing and playing. Then, bitten by the bug of ambition, Joel looked for greater fields to conquer. He moved north and gave banjo concerts in the Eastern states. Now he was no longer a backwoods boy playing upon a humble Negro instrument, but a full-fledged performer. His successes in Yankee land encouraged him to cross the ocean and tour England. It is said that his novelty act finally attracted the attention of Queen Victoria, before whom he gave a command performance; then with the accolade of royalty upon his work he wandered, like a strolling minstrel of old, about the realm, giving banjo concerts for the nobility. After a year of this life he decided that he had enough money to retire, so he returned home, prepared to settle down to a life of quiet and ease.

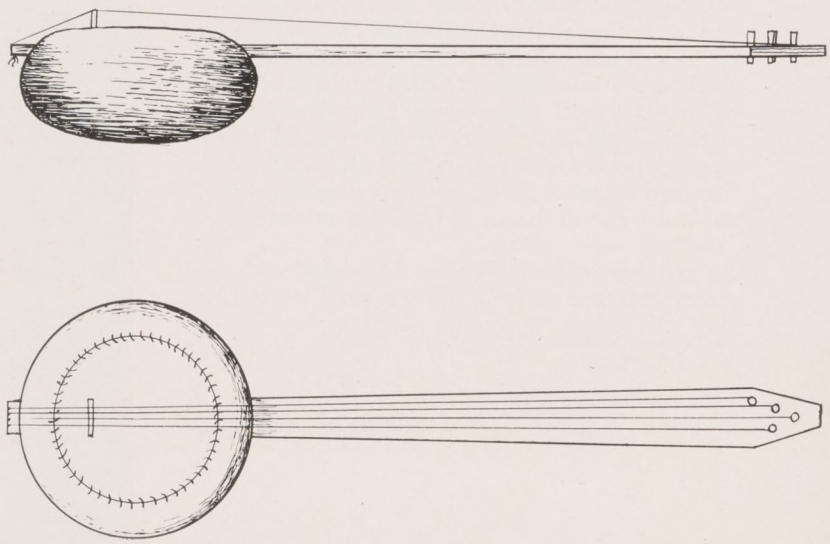
By this time, however, Joel was a seasoned trouper with the plaudits of enthusiastic spectators ringing in his ears. Country life in Virginia seemed slow and altogether too boring. So, organizing a small company of blackface entertainers, he set forth once more and toured the United States. It has been claimed by some that "Old Joe's" company was the first of a long line of minstrel shows which continued as popular entertainment well into the 1890's.

It cannot be denied that during his lifetime Joel was the foremost of the blackface minstrels. He has been called the "father of American minstrelsy." Judge R. B. Pore of Appomatox Court House, who, as a child, remembered Sweeney, said of him in later years:

> "Joe Sweeney was a fine delineator of the Negro character. Raised as he was in the midst of them and possessing a quick observation and a keen sense of the ludicrous, he made his

Negro Gourd Shell Banjo (from the Williamsburg painting here illustrated)

—Drawn by Cal N. Peters



concerts very attractive, because his manners and language were so true to the original. Nearly all the leading minstrels who have since met with success, at one time or another belonged to Old Joe's Band.

"The Old Joe breakdown, Johnny Booker and Old Zip Coon, have given amusement to thousands by all sorts of performers, but none could equal Old Joe in his specialties."

Mr. Fred Mather, a younger contemporary of Sweeney, who later became a minstrel-banjoist, writing in December, 1897, said:

"I knew 'Old Joe Sweeney' about 1846 or '48 when I was a boy of thirteen to fifteen. He came North with a circus twice in different years. He taught me how to 'bring down my thumb' and play 'Grape Vine Twist.' 'Old' Joe! I've wondered why, 'Old.' As near as I can remember he was not over thirty then. Perhaps his song,

Old Joe, a-kickin' up behind and befo'
An' a yaller gal kickin' up behind Old Joe,

was the origin.

"I believe there is no doubt that he was the first to put the thumb string on the banjo, the 'chaunter' or 'chanter' we called it then, but I've not heard the word in years."

Mather also commented on the playing techniques of the early banjoists:

"I do not read music but can spell it out painfully, note by note. In the long ago, when I was a fair manipulator of the 'gourd shell,' I remember only three banjoists who read notes. They were Dan Emmett, G. Swayne Buckley and Frank B. Converse, who, by the way, was on the stage but a short time. Joe Sweeney didn't know a note, nor did most of the banjoists of 40 or 50 years ago. In fact, when I was a boy, I often heard it said: 'There are no notes to a banjo, you just play it.'

"The Old Plantation"—water color, about 1800. Found near Columbia, South Carolina, but said to have come from a plantation near Charleston

—In the Ludwell-Paradise House at Williamsburg, Virginia. Photograph from Colonial Williamsburg, the Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr. Collection of American Folk Art

"Old Dan Emmett was the great banjo man of my day. His forte was in stringing off nonsense and making it sound well. He played jigs for me in slow time, 'Old Folks at Home' as slow as Parepa Rose sang it. My doubles and trebles on the sanded floor put in all the variations. Old Dan used to sing:

Talk it all de night long, de night long.
What's dat down dar dat you pick up?
Shoo shall de Egyptian
Walk troo de garden to Jerusalem.
Rock, Susanna, do fare you well (*etc.*) . . .

Old Simon Buckhart, de hearty, hearty hart
He kep' a full sale grocery store, an'
Had two peck measures; one hold two quarts
An' de odder didn't hold half a pint;
No! not by a jug full.

and such stuff, that wouldn't go now, but was original then, and took."

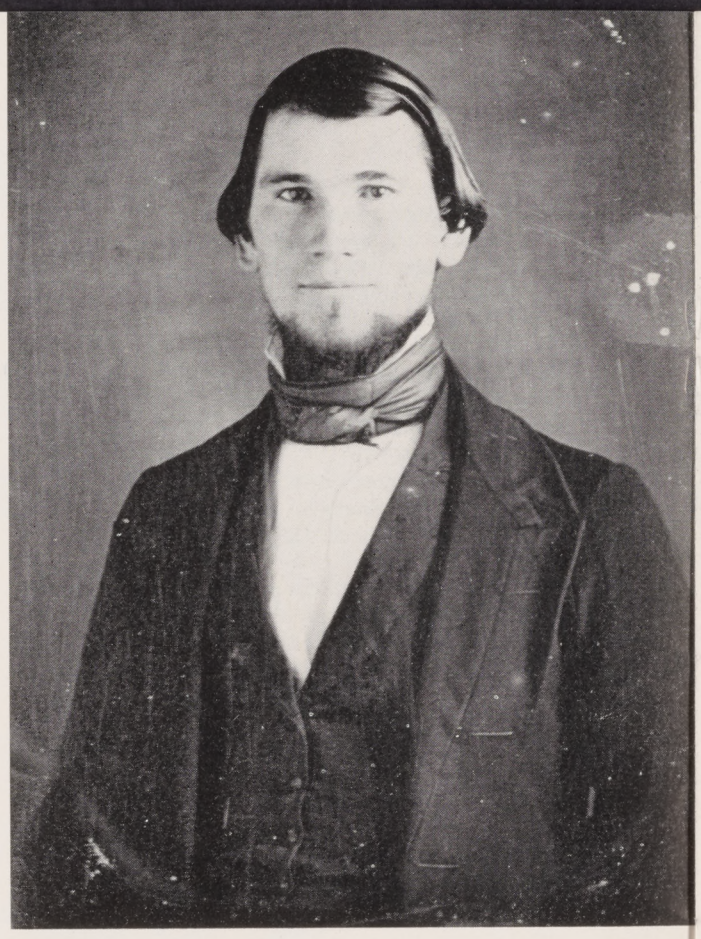
As we have mentioned, Joel's younger brothers Sam and Richard, the latter more familiarly known as Dick, were both good banjo players. Dick was two years younger than Joe, and Sam was the youngest of all. Dick traveled around giving concerts. He was a good entertainer and a public favorite. He died in 1860 and is buried in Washington, D.C.

It remained for Sam to become immortalized in Southern history. At first, he was with his two brothers and aided in giving their original concerts, but he outlived them both by a few years. Joe died before the Civil War began, and is buried at Appomatox Court House.

Sam, being a true Southerner, joined the Virginia cavalry.[2] His skill with the banjo attracted General J. E. B. Stuart. A jealous contemporary of Stuart, trying to belittle "Beauty Stuart of Laurel Hill," said in 1863: "Stuart carries around with him a banjo player" — intimating, perhaps, that Stuart cared more for music than for fighting. This petty criticism did not hold water and Sam Sweeney rode with Stuart, fighting, playing and singing Stuart's favorite song, "Lorena."

Stephen Vincent Benet in his great epic poem, "John Brown's Body," has linked these two men

[2]Samuel D. Sweeney was listed as a private on the roster of Co. H, 2nd Virginia Cavalry. The same source also notes that he was "a great banjo player," and that he died of smallpox at Hanover Court House.
—H. B. McClellan, *The Campaigns of Stuart's Cavalry* (p.440).



Dick Sweeney

for all time in his quick, incisive character sketch of "Jeb" Stuart:

"With all the actor's grace and quick light charm
That makes the women adore him—a wild cavalier
Who worships as sober a God as Stonewall Jackson,
A Rupert who seldom drinks, very often prays,
Loves his children, singing, fighting, spurs and wife.
Sweeney, his banjo player, follows him."

Yes, Sweeney followed Stuart until the red mists of battle swallowed up the famed Southern leader at the fatal skirmish at the Yellow Tavern. After Stuart's death, it is said Sweeney was transferred to General Fitz Lee's headquarters, where he continued to play and sing for his battle-weary comrades.[3]

[3]Lieut. Col. W. W. Blackford, of Jeb Stuart's staff, mentions Sweeney several times in his memoirs *War Years with Jeb Stuart* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945):

In 1890, Mr. F. J. Henning, a teacher of music and a skilled banjo performer, learned of the existence of Joel Sweeney's original banjo, which was then in the possession of Mrs. Polly Ann Patterson, Joel's niece, at Appomatox Court House. He entered into negotiations with the family, and secured the old instrument. He also obtained three original daguerreotype pictures of the three Sweeney brothers, which are alleged to be the only ones in existence. After Mr. Henning's death the banjo, daguerreotypes, and confirmatory documents concerning the history and purchase of the banjo from the Sweeney family were given to the Museum by his widow.

The banjo is made of a dark, reddish colored, hard wood. The head is of stained leather, fastened on with tacks. There are no strings. Scratched in the wood, still faintly visible, are the initials "J.S."

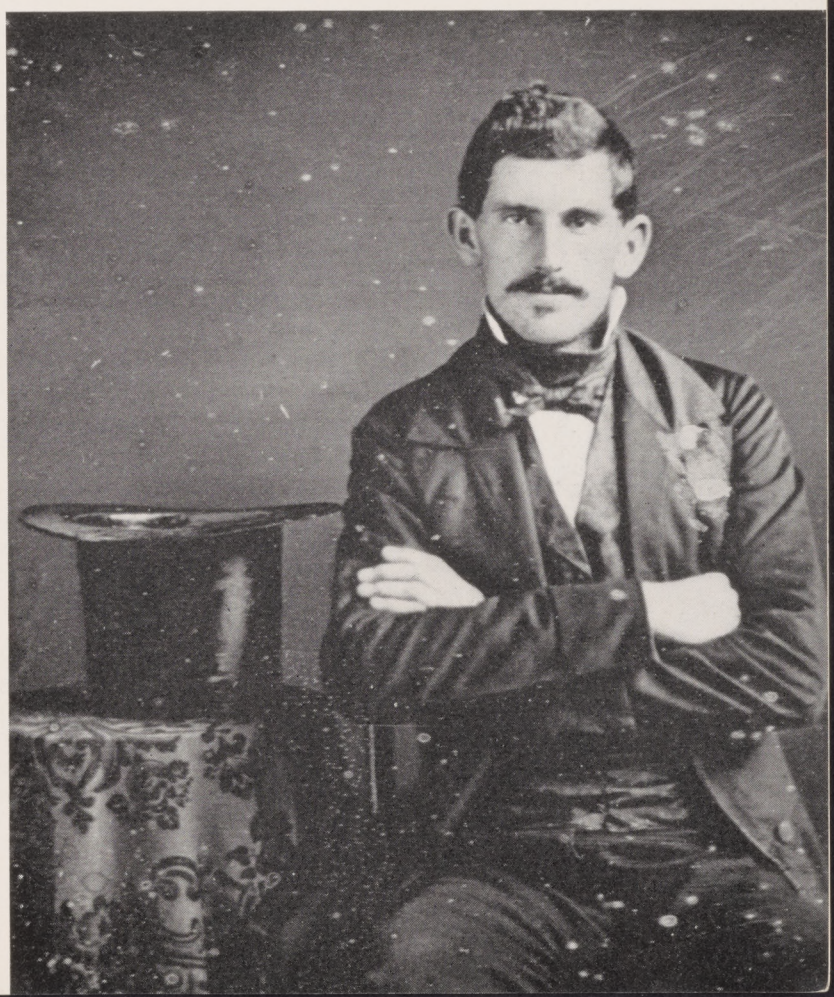
—ARTHUR WOODWARD.

Or: "Whenever he [Stuart] would hear of a man who had any amusing specialty and was willing to come, he would have him detailed as a courier at headquarters. For such duty, of course, the wishes of the man were consulted. In this way he collected around him a number of experts, not only in music but in theatricals and tricks of various kinds, and they added much to the pleasure of camp life. Sweeny and his banjo and his negro melodies were the favorites; and Sweeny always carried his instrument slung at his back on marches, and often in long night marches, the life of the men was restored by its tinkle." (P.51.)

Blackford's final reference to Sweeney's ability (p.162) states: 'We had at headquarters a capital band of singers who were accompanied by Sweeny on his banjo. Bob, the General's mulatto servant, on the bones, and occasionally by a violin and other instruments. But the main standby was Sweeny and his banjo, and every evening at the Bower* this formed a part of the entertainment." (*The Bower was the residence of the Dandridges, about ten miles from Charlestown, Virginia, where Stuart had his headquarters in 1862.)

"General Stuart's headquarters were not far off, and I often visited there. Stuart had now reorganized the band of stringed instruments and singers which afterwards became so well known and associated with him. Sweeny [sic], a brother of the celebrated Joe Sweeny, the banjo player who had brought the banjo into European notice by his skill upon it, was one of the band; he played the banjo and sang. Bob, the General's mulatto servant, worked the bones, and then there was a violin player and a guitar player and quite a number of singers among the staff and couriers." (Pp. 50-51. This was in the fall of 1861.)

Again, speaking of Stuart and his habits in the field: "I have often seen him busy arranging for some of his most brilliant cavalry movements, and after all was prepared, come out of his tent, call for Sweeny and the banjo and perhaps for some of the men to dance for him . . ." (P.89.)



Sam Sweeney

FIG. 1—*Excavated section at the McKittrick field (Sites 3 and 4 left, Site 5 right) showing stratification of asphalt overlying oil-saturated sands*

A MODERN ASPHALT SEEP TELLS A STORY

Much scholarly attention has been given the La Brea tar pits,[1] and much has been written about the spectacular entrapment of now-strange animals that occurred at La Brea in the Pleistocene age. This is the account of a modern La Brea. For today at McKittrick, not far north of Los Angeles, living creatures are being imprisoned by flowing tar, just as the mastodons and giant sloths, lions and saber-tooth cats were once caught and preserved in the tar pits of our own area.

About 25 years ago the writer was visiting a government oil man at Taft, California, and while going over the oilfields was taken to a site where the University of California, excavating an asphalt pit, had found bones of many animals.

The next visit to Taft was made September 30th 1945, shortly after the investigation of the microfauna of the Rancho La Brea asphalt was begun. Naturally there was a desire to obtain some asphalt from the McKittrick field, about 12 miles north of Taft, for comparison. While many large animal bones had been found there, the insect record was almost nil, although there were statements that the asphalt contained dragonfly remains. On account of their fragility, and the turmoil in the asphalt, no evidences of dragonflies have yet been found at La Brea.

The old University pits gave no promise, but the vast field of asphalt had just been cut by a new road, and a splitting of the bank (Fig. 1) had exposed some fresh and unweathered material. Lifting a clump which belonged to the stratum 2 feet down, we experienced a surprise. For here were layers of beetle remains. A week's vacation was spent washing out insects from the asphalt, and the resulting material is now to be seen in La Brea Hall.

In August 1947, Leonard Bessom of the Earth Sciences staff visited the road-cut and found fine material at the 4-foot level, at what we called Site 4. Many dragonflies and beetles were included in this discovery. It was such a rich haul that over a year has been spent in "separating out" the multitudes

[1]This great site, in Hancock Park and now in the very midst of the city, is administered by the Museum, which has long been world-famous for its La Brea collections.

of insect fragments,—and best of all, every species so far critically studied from this level has proved new to science.

The following November, a Museum field group visited the site and found that Site 3 and 4 were only three feet apart. Samples were taken at Sites 3-4 (Fig. 1, *left*) at every six inches of depth for eight feet; and new samplings were made at other spots 50 feet apart, such as Site 5 (Fig. 1, *right*).

Fig. 1 shows the stratification of the asphalt, and the slight tilt of the layers, for the liquid tar was flowing gently down a hillside. The dark upper portion consists of 4 zones, 27 inches in all, the two top zones of black tar, the third brown, the fourth black again (the color depends upon the amount of fine silt enclosed),—all these overlying a broad brown zone, with at the bottom a narrower black zone. Insects and bones occur at all levels.

Fig. 2 gives the appearance of the upper 4 zones, and an idea of annual deposits. In a preliminary way, it may be said that an inch of asphalt represents 10 or more years of deposit, possibly up to 25 years. About two feet of recent asphalt had been peeled off the top of this field by commercial interests, so that what remains is old.

A small lump (Fig. 3 and *detail,* Fig. 4) from the 4-foot level gives an idea of the richness of the deposit. Here can be seen dragonflies, beetles, a bug, a grasshopper leg. Any lump of tar at any depth in this field will contain large numbers of insect fragments, and often bones, and seeds. It is thus apparent that a systematic study, layer by layer, will disclose a record of the small life through all the centuries. And when we establish the relative timing of particular insects in this deposit we will have a measuring-stick for the insects of Rancho La Brea.

A few hundred yards beyond the ancient field is a ravine with a new flow of asphalt (Fig. 5), and here are to be found the answers to many of the questions raised by the McKittrick deposits. The fluid tar comes out of a hole in the hillside and flows in a shallow stream for several hundred feet, permeating the sand, and nowhere more than ¼ inch in depth. This is called Site 13. It is really unlucky for any creature coming that way, for if an animal or insect touches the viscid surface it is doomed. Early in 1947 a rabbit was caught. Probably it was sighted by a raven, for the raven now lies beside the rabbit. The rabbit is nothing but bones, but the raven's feathers still remain.

The tar is black and shining, and looks like water (probably there is no water within ten miles), and the blue sky is mirrored in it. Dragonflies are constantly hovering over it, and dart down to oviposit. Hundreds of them have been caught, though they are strong fliers. In Fig. 6 there are at least 16 dragonflies. So it may be seen why we find layers of them in the ancient deposits.

Fig. 7 shows two mice (the eye of one is still noticeable), a young lizard, at least six dragonflies and some seed. The scum of dust forms in the fall, and by November first the flow of asphalt stops

FIG. 2—*The writer at Site 4, computing from measurement of the upper zones of deposit, here clearly marked in light-and-dark contrast*

FIG. 4 (above)—*Enlarged detail of Fig. 3 with exposed grasshopper leg (upper left), head of dragonfly (center) and beetle (lower right)*

FIG. 3 (below)—*Clump of mastic as excavated from 4-foot depth, Site 4, showing preservation of many different insects (see text)*

for the year. Evaporation, and the movement of the liquid, reduces the depth of the annual deposit almost to the thickness of the tar-soaked dust and the life that has been caught. In another year a new flow will fill the uneven spaces with new catches, and bury the fragments deeper.

The thrasher in Fig. 8, caught over a year before, will be completely covered in another year. Animals in every stage of decomposition can be seen. A rattlesnake was found in the gaseous state, while the raven was in the final state of decomposition, that of dessication. The flesh is decayed by bacteria and consumed by insects, and only the bones at last remain, with such hairs as were originally caught in the tar. The bones, feathers, and exposed skins are subjected to the elements for months before complete imbedment. This is why paleontologists have found the McKittrick animal bones more brittle than those from Rancho La Brea. Here the entrapment is shallow, and the process of completely covering an animal is very slow.

FIG. 5—*Desert landscape near the ancient field, with shallow flow of tar (at Site 13) where entrapment is now in process*

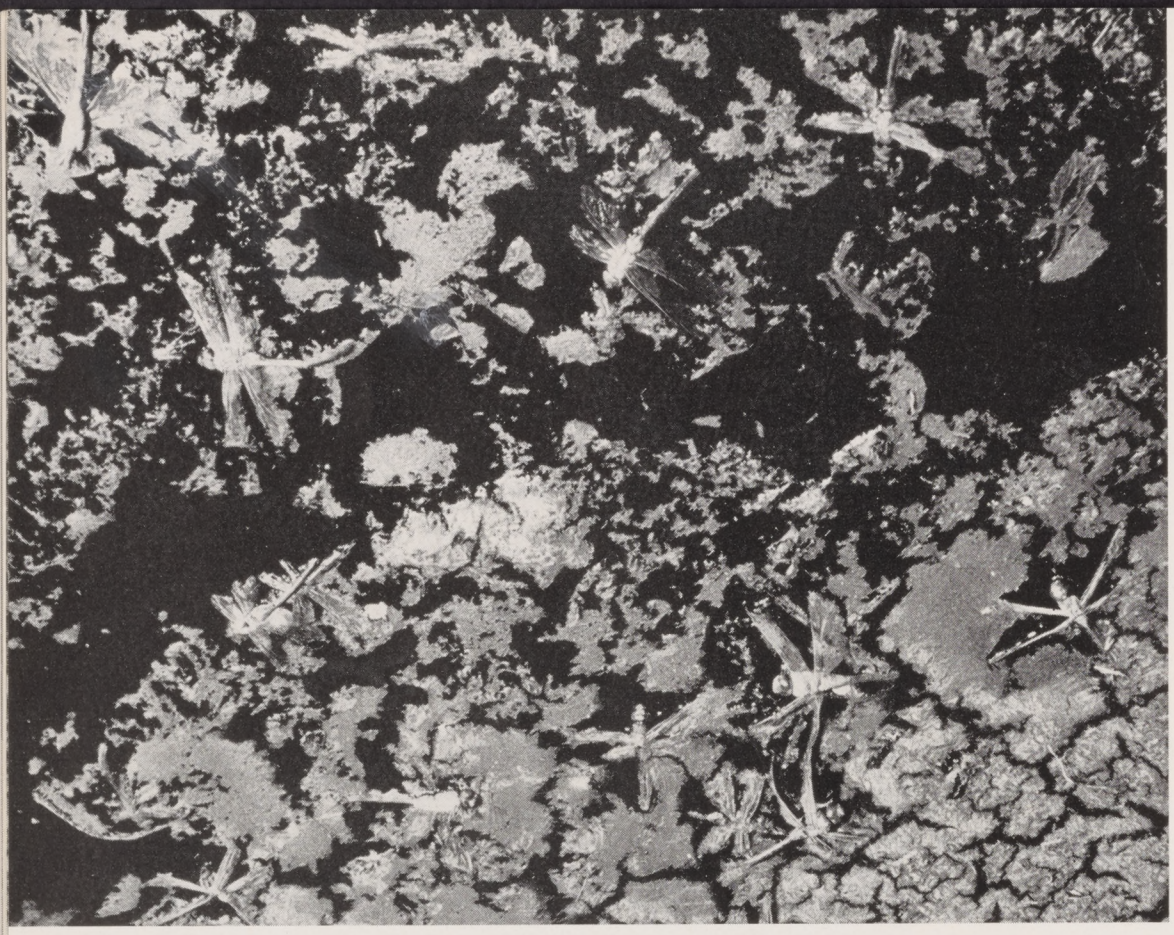


FIG. 6 (above)—*Surface of modern tar flow, showing many dragonflies and the beginning of crust formation*

FIG. 7 (below)—*Surface of tar with recently caught lizard, mice, dragonflies and scattered seed*

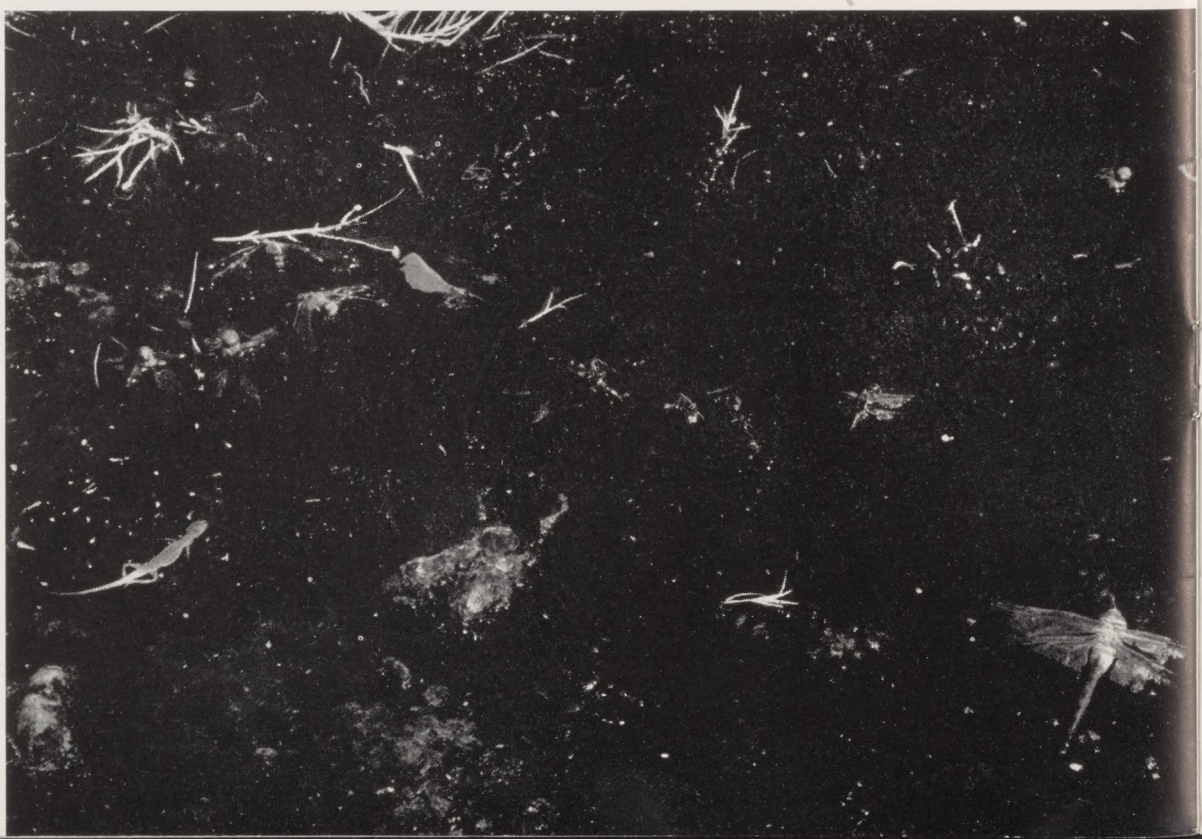


FIG. 8—*Thrasher caught a year ago in tar flow, now half imbedded and to be covered in another year*

The material already collected from the stratified deposits will require many months of minute and detailed study, but from the finds at different levels we may be able to give an idea of the periods of climate at McKittrick for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. In this one spot, the road-cut exposes a cross-section of deposits representing (at ten years to the inch) over 960 years. In other places the deposits are deeper, and experts say that some of them will date back to the Middle Pleistocene.

So far, all field work has been done by one-day trips of parties numbering 4 to 10 volunteers, who work on specific tasks for the day. Many studies of the modern life must be made, in order to interpret the older material. In the work accomplished, this year's tar has already produced two beetles of species now existing but new to the Museum collection.

—W. DWIGHT PIERCE

Excepting Figs 3 and 4, all photographs were taken by Mr. Harry Watson of the Los Angeles Daily News

THE SPRING "ROBIN"

The "little robin redbreast" of the old nursery rhyme is a European bird. As it frequently stays close to human habitation when food is scarce, and gives voice to its warbling note even in the dead of winter, it has become a well-beloved friend of man.

When the early Pilgrims, homesick for English scenes, were greeted with the song of the red-breasted American thrush, they were reminded of the Robin of their homeland and the name was passed on to the American bird. But though both European and American "robins" belong to the thrush family, they are really quite different species. The American bird is a true thrush, while the English Redbreast is related to the nightingales, birds which are not known in America.

—H.H.

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